



October 29, 2017

Thirtieth Sunday of Ordinary Time

"The second is like it: you shall love your neighbor as yourself." —Matthew 22:39

Dear Friends;

At the end of our Civil War two Confederate women from Tennessee came to Washington DC to see President Abraham Lincoln. They were petitioning for the release of their husbands from the Johnson Island prisoner of war facility. Lincoln put off their interview a couple times. They finally met on a Saturday. During the interview one of the ladies stressed to Lincoln that her husband was a religious man.

At the end of the interview the President ordered the release of the two prisoners. He turned to the one lady and said, *"You say your husband is a religious man. Tell him when you meet him, that I say I am not much of a judge of religion. In my opinion, however, the religion that sets men to rebel and fight against their governments... [so that they can] eat their bread off the sweat of other men's faces, is not the sort of religion upon which people can get into heaven!"*

Lincoln understood that love of God can only be measured in terms of our love for all human beings. This is certainly the understanding behind our passage from the Book of Exodus. It comes from the oldest collection of laws in the Hebrew Bible. It was known as the Book of the Covenant and expresses through its law code the will of God for the People of the Covenant.

Notice it demands that the foreign-alien, the widow and orphan are of special concern for God. They stand for all who are vulnerable. Nor are we to hold hostage those in need so we can get the payment of interest. They all deserve protected status because God is a God who protects the lowly. That is why he brought the people out of slavery in Egypt. If they behave like the Egyptians they forfeit their claims on the saving love of God.

This Exodus reading ties in to our passage from the Gospel of Matthew. Exodus gives us concrete examples. In the Gospel Jesus gives a very traditional answer to the question he is asked. He says all the law is summarized in the two commandments to "love God" and "love your neighbor." The purpose of the law was to hold together the people of God in harmony and love.

Individual concerns must be reconciled with the good of the whole group. Sin divides us into us and them, saints and sinners, deserving and undeserving. Sin sees not people, but how much money we can make. Sin places our ideologies and rules before people. Sin separates us into so many individuals motivated only by self-interest. The command of God calls us to solidarity, communion and the common good. We must listen to the cries of the vulnerable, undocumented immigrant children, minorities, those who need healthcare, those who need to rebuild after a disaster and those forgotten by our economic systems. We will be judged on it!

The great ancient rabbi, Hillel may still have been alive when Jesus was born. Hillel said, *"What is hateful to you do not do to your neighbor; that is the whole Torah, while the rest is commentary on it; go and learn it."* Jesus put it this way in another part of Matthew (7:12): *"In everything, do to others as you would have them do to you; for this is the law and the prophets."* Love knows no boundaries let us go forth and do it!

Peace,

Fr. Ron

Esta carta está en español en el sitio web: www.stannechurchbyron.com